



Exploring the Role of Folklore in Preserving and Transmitting Cultural Heritage across Generations: A Qualitative Study of Muzaffarabad, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: January 18, 2025 Revised: February 25, 2025 Accepted: February 28, 2025 Available Online: March 02, 2025	<i>Folklore has been a vital medium for transmitting cultural heritage, moral values, and social identity in Muzaffarabad. However, modernization, urbanization, and digital influences have significantly weakened its traditional transmission. This study employed a qualitative research method, utilizing a phenomenological research design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that younger generations are increasingly disconnected from folklore due to changing family structures, reduced intergenerational storytelling, and the dominance of digital entertainment. The decline of communal storytelling gatherings has further contributed to cultural erosion. Despite these challenges, respondents highlighted the potential of integrating folklore into education, utilizing digital platforms, and promoting storytelling events to ensure its continuity. Documentation efforts, such as written and audiovisual recordings, were also emphasized as essential for preserving folklore. The study underscores the need to adapt folklore transmission methods to contemporary contexts while maintaining its traditional essence for future generations.</i>
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Introduction

As one of the most important aspect of cultural heritage folklore is that it allows to preserve and pass on traditions, values and collective memories from one generation to the next. This includes

everything from oral traditions, myths, legends, proverbs, rituals, music, dance, and other cultural expressions that help define a society (Setiawan, 2024). Folklore serves one purpose in addition, which is it's a record, or a retainer of a community's past experiences, wisdom, and values. Folklore across many cultures historically has served an important role to keep intergeneration connection and uphold shared cultural identities. It acts as a medium, a soul tie between the past, present, and future of a place, safeguarding the cultural heritage of a participant.

Folklore has historically been transmitted through oral storytelling, performances, and shared engagement in cultural traditions. Storytelling often represents an important part of education in many indigenous and rural societies as older generations share knowledge, wisdom, and societal norms with younger generations (Bihari, 2023). This process helps to ensure cultural continuity, and reinforces a sense of belonging within the community. Such as the Griot (an oral historian) known by many African cultures to have recited the history of their tribes in the form of storytelling, song, and poetic recitation, Africans preserved their remembrance of the past without the need for writing (Dembedza et al., 2022). In the South Asian context, too, the stories of Panchatantra and Jataka serve as moral and ethical guides for young generations imbibing knowledge (Shukla, 2025).

Folklore goes beyond the spoken word, finding expression in music, dance and ritual that offer outlets for cultural expression and community bonding. Not only artistic arenas, classical folk dances such as Céilí dance in Ireland and Dragon Dance in China, are embodiments of all those histories, while at the same time symbolizing a pride in proven cultural identity (Lenzerini, 2011). Folklore-based festivals like Mexico's Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) and Japan's Obon Festival are designed to honor ancestors and highlight the value of remembering and respecting the past (Vila, 2021). In fact, these traditions also serve as cultural sustainability mechanisms that prevent the disconnection of future generations from their cultural foundations.

Yet, in the contemporary world, folklore has immense implications in the transfer of cultural heritage, which is boisterously challenged. With the quick expansion of globalization, urbanization, and technological progress, traditional storytelling methods and folklore-derived cultural expressions have faded away (Ooms, 1967). In this case, perhaps, the younger generation has been overly swayed by digital media and Westernized mass entertainment to find traditional folklore relevant, resulting in a looser intergenerational transmission. Also, migration and cultural assimilation contributed to the erosion of indigenous folklore, with individuals adopting the new cultural identity and practices in the host societies (Castles, 2002).

However, so that there are efforts to preserve and revitalize folklore in relation to the modern context. In response to this problem, UNESCO recognized folklore as one of the valuable aspects of intangible cultural heritage and officially approved projects to document and protect traditional knowledge (Leimgruber, 2010). Modern tools for the preservation and expansion of folklore have happened with digitized stories, the museum archives, and the educational program (Sims & Stephens, 2011). Integrating folklore into school curriculums and cultural initiatives can help societies to ensure that traditional narratives, music, and customs are handed down to future generations. To probe into defining the role of folklore in the transfer of cultural heritage between generations, notably in the exchange of different forms of folklore to facilitate knowledge among generations.

Problem of Statement

This has been an effective way to transmit the culture for people living in District Muzaffarabad as folklore captures the essence of traditions and ensures that the values and historical narratives are passed down. But globalization, urbanization and digital influences have broken that transmission, and traditional storytelling, music and rituals are in decline. Younger generations are growing farther and farther from their cultural roots, preferring modern entertainment rather than indigenous folklore. Another factor is rural-urban migration and the diminishing role of the elders as custodians of knowledge, which hampers the transmission of knowledge and traditions across generations. The absence of institutional support, on the other hand, as well as the lack of formal documentation make several oral traditions at risk of dying out. Education system in AJK do not promote folklore; hence there are less to no chances for Cultural involvement. With no active preservation efforts, the region is in danger of losing an essential component of its identity. These steps must be accompanied by the strengthening of folk transmission facilitated by education, digital media and community initiatives to protect the survival of AJK's rich cultural heritage for the future.

Research Objectives

1. To explore folklore's role in preserving cultural values and traditions.
2. To analyze the impact of globalization and technology on folklore transmission.
3. To examine various folklore forms and their contribution to cultural identity.
4. To identify strategies for folklore preservation and revitalization.

Literature Review

This section includes a literature review on key aspects of folklore and cultural transmission. It covers the Theoretical Foundations of Folklore and Cultural Transmission, exploring core theories and frameworks. The Types of Folklore and Their Role in Cultural Heritage discuss various forms and their significance in preserving identity. The Challenges of Folklore Transmission in the Contemporary Era highlight modernization's impact on oral traditions. Finally, Strategies for Preserving and Revitalizing Folklore examine efforts to sustain and adapt folklore for future generations.

Theoretical Foundations of Folklore and Cultural Transmission

For centuries folklore has been acknowledged as an important part of cultural heritage, serving as a vehicle to maintain traditions, morals and collective identity. Folklore is a vast category that encompasses oral narratives, myths, legends, proverbs, music, dance, and rituals, that persist in a community, passed down from one generation to another (Storey, 2009). folktales work as a source of entertainment and education; in fact, it indeed helps to remind the social norms, values, and further historical knowledge (Jiayang, 2024). By embedding these values in stories, rituals, and performances, folklore plays a crucial role in the transmission of traditions and practices, contributing to the identity of both individuals and communities.

Thus, one of the most potent theoretical lenses through which to consider folklore transmission derives from Bascom's (1965) four functions of folklore: entertainment, education, cultural validation, and social control. In this sense, these functions demonstrate folklore as more than mere entertainment rather as a means of maintaining history and affirming morals. This is because oral tradition, as the name suggests, is the main way of transmitting what we call folklore,

something which helps communities to transmit knowledge, beliefs and customs in an appealing and memorable way (Arifin & Karen, 2024).

Another important theoretical perspective is Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital, which emphasizes understanding folklore as inherited knowledge that functions to perpetuate social continuity. Specifically, that it is no mere replication of information but a deep-seated assimilation of the values, mores and behaviors enshrined in the folklore (Calhoun, 1993). This perspective is consistent with the oral-formulaic model introduced by Lord (1986), a theory that accounts for some of the structural parameters found in oral narratives. Lord's research shows oral traditions with keep with formulaic expressions and mnemonic devices, which he argues for results in oral narratives being preserved across generations but with slight reshaping based on the contextual circumstances.

Moreover, an exploration of Turner (1992) on theories of rituals and liminality reveals how folklore works out the cultural identity. Storytelling is one of the main forms of folklore practiced, and can play a big role in rituals and festivals that offers individuals a transformative experience and affirming their communities, their collective cultural memory. These ceremonies provide opportunities through which participants develop a profound sense of belonging to their culture and heritage.

Types of Folklore and Their Role in Cultural Heritage

Folklore takes myriad forms, each of which plays a different role in preserving and passing on culture. Oral traditions like folktales, myths, and proverbs can be powerful mediums used of embedding moral lessons and cultural values in stories (Bascom, 1954). Such as proverbs which are indeed compacted statements of collective wisdom, mentioning what is socially acceptable, what are the ethics of our social interactions and which responsibilities we have toward each other and the community. This aspect of folklore guarantees that cultural knowledge is preserved in an organized, yet flexible, way which makes it possible for every generation to make sense of the compositions in relation to their own setting (Baltymova & Pangereyev, 2023).

One more important aspect of the transmission of cultural heritage is through music and dance. Traditional music is often rooted in indigenous languages, spiritual traditions, and historical narrative, functioning as a cultural archive for a community. Folk dances of various cultures, like flamenco in Spain, bharatanatyam in India, and the haka in New Zealand, are not simply artistic expressions but also reflections of the historical and symbolic stories that encode national and ethnic identities. Dance perfectly encapsulates this, using choreography and singing as cultural expression with an inbuilt sense of connection, as they instantaneously become a reaffirmation of identity and tradition (Arifin & Karen, 2024).

Another important dimension of folklore transmission is that of rituals and festivals. They act as intergenerational knowledge exchange sites to guard against younger generations becoming separated from culture. Celebrations like that of Mexico (Día de los Muertos) and Japan (Obon Festival) are not only events of community attendance but also acts of remembrance and the continuity between the ancestor and descendant, so too, indigenous knowledges, like that of African griots and Native American elders, continue to serve as mechanisms of dissemination for oral histories and cultural knowledge. These traditions showcase how folklore is a mutable and participatory process, rather than simply a fossilized trace of the past (Thurston, 2024).

Challenges of Folklore Transmission in the Contemporary Era

Even the folk people have several problems with the modernity of life in the world while its cultural importance must be preserved. The rise of globalization has posed one of the greatest threats to folklore preservation as it continues to promote cultural homogenization, marginalizing local narratives. Due to the prevalence of Westernized media and entertainment as global cultural consumption, younger generations are far less engaged with indigenous folklore, which is resulting in its slow decline (Suharyanto & Wiflihani, 2024).

The erosion of folklore is further fueled by migration and the urbanization of our societies. Traditional societies around the world are experiencing rapid socio-economic changes, leading to the displacement of communities and the erosion of culture continuity. As individuals migrate to cities and blend into new local cultures, these ancestral customs tend to fade away. Such cultural significance is of paramount importance within communities of the diaspora, as individuals belonging to the younger generations may not possess an understanding or appreciation of their cultural link (Sims & Stephens, 2011).

The traditional modes of folklore transmission have also been transformed by technological advancements. While oral storytelling and folklore-based education have suffered with the advent of the digital media, visual and digital entertainment have rapidly progressed. Technology both enables the preservation of folklore and played a part in the waning of elders' roles in storytelling traditions. Younger generations in many societies gravitate towards social media, online streaming, and Western pop culture, rather than traditional folklore, at the expense of intergenerational cultural exchange (Sarrang & Sangiamvibool, 2024).

Folklore's demise is also compounded by economic pressures. The economic pressures of the era have forced younger generations in many developing regions to prioritize engagement with work and formal education over cultural practices. Because of this, traditional storytelling, rituals and crafts related to folklore no longer become a livelihood and slowly unsafe these practices from the world (Ogbo & Ndubisi, 2024).

Strategies for Preserving and Revitalizing Folklore

Nevertheless, attempts are being made to preserve and revive folklore. Folklore has been designated as an important part of intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO and has initiated activities to document and protect traditional knowledge. Digital archiving projects (like the World Oral Literature Project) provide an invaluable service in recording and preserving endangered folklore traditions as a cultural resource for future generations (Dalyan et al., 2024)

Education is yet another crucial strategy for preserving folklore. Folklore needs to be integrated within the school curriculums to develop cultural appreciation and transmit traditional narratives to children (Sims & Stephens, 2011). You can also engage with schools and cultural institutions to help promote storytelling workshops, folklore festivals, and heritage education programs to enhance intergenerational transfers of cultural knowledge.

Technology can also act as a folklore-reprieving tool. Did you know some accessible means of documenting and sharing folklore? Examples include digital storytelling platforms, podcasts, and virtual archives. The spread of social media and online video hosting platforms have pervaded the folklore landscape and enabled broader reach and engagement of younger generations with folk traditions (Bihari, 2023).

Such initiatives capture much folk music and dance, and provide one avenue of folklore revitalization. Throughout these events, there is motivation for first-hand engagement with cultural traditions, and opportunities for cultural knowledge exchange take place intergenerationally. On the other hand, government interventions of supporting indigenous languages, cultural heritage site and traditional knowledge system, are critical in preserving folklore as an active practice as opposed to a historical artifact (Miao & Zhang, 2024).

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research methodology by adopting a phenomenological research design to understand the role of folklore in the transmission of the cultural heritage of District Muzaffarabad, Azad Jammu and Kashmir in Pakistan. Listening to oral stories helped to deepen the understanding of folklore, the study aimed to validate folklore's purpose in cultural perpetuation. Researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) for data collection. Elders, folk artists, and educators were interviewed to reveal their experiences, perceptions, and challenges when it comes to folklore preservation. 30 Participants through purposive Sampling were interviewed in an open-ended manner, enabling rich and detailed accounts of views. In these focus group discussions, younger generations constituted a large part of the participants, such as students and youth groups discussing how they engage with folklore and whether or not it still matters in modern society. The group discussions offered an engaging environment to exchange divergent views and make generational comparisons. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework that consists of six steps: (a) familiarization, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the final report. This enabled a structured, yet flexible, qualitative data analysis. Interpretations were validated using member checking and triangulation of data sources to support consistency. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and ethical considerations, including confidentiality, were applied to respect cultural sensitivities.

Results and Discussion

This section contains the most important themes that were identified through the analysis, demonstrating trends and implications of the findings. The Discussion section interprets these findings in the context of existing literature and theoretical frameworks, conclusion outlines the key findings of the study and discusses their implications and recommendations provide concrete steps for future research and policy work to address the concerns identified.

Theme 1: Folklore as a Medium for Cultural Identity Preservation

Folklore acts as a cornerstone of cultural identity, connecting generations via oral traditions. This sense of belonging and continuity gives individuals a connection to their ancestors and cultural roots.

A respondent narrated:

"From my childhood, my grandmother has told me stories of the bravery and the wisdom of our forefathers. These stories were more than just words; they were a way to teach me who we are. Each night, after supper, everyone would converge where my grandmother would share stories of kings, warriors, village heroes. Through these stories, I heard about my lineage and the traditions

that have shaped us. Yet, today, I have only sporadic company in my grandchildren, who still listen to me tell these stories. They are glued to their mobile phones more and more, watching videos or playing games, and I am afraid that they are growing up detached from our past."

Significance: This story illustrates the importance of folklore in loss and continuity of cultural identity. But it also highlights the challenge of technological advances, which have limited the engagement of the younger generation with oral traditions. Folklore is not only prevalent in stories but also exists in songs, proverbs, and rituals that keep the communal past alive.

Another respondent added:

"In our village, traditional songs constitute an integral part of every celebration, be it a wedding, a harvest festival or a community gathering. The songs we sing tell the stories of the struggles and triumphs of our ancestors, the wisdom of our elders and the values by which we live. These songs are like living history books, from one generation to the next. But I have seen fewer and fewer young people at these events. They love modern music and find our folk songs old-fashioned. And when I sing these songs, I feel like I carry the voice of my ancestors, but if these songs are not learned, then that voice will fade away forever."

This statement shows that folklore is a vibrant living tradition that represents a cultural identity that is not limited to oral storytelling. These are the words that may one day ring through the halls of history, where folk music will become just that — a dormant relic of a hot summer day, or an echo of a winter's night, without any effort to capture local artistry for the next generation.

Theme 2: The Generational Gap in Folklore Engagement

Folklore is one area where the gap between the old and young generation has grown, as seen from elders' perspective. That transition from communal storytelling to digital entertainment hasn't helped either.

A respondent narrated:

"When I believe I was a boy, the biggest event of the day is when the oldsters sit in a circle and reminisce about the old days. That was how we learned history, values and lessons about life." However, now I'm noticing that my grandkids don't seem to have the interest. Whenever I attempt to narrate a folk tale to them, they fast lose interest and reach for their handheld screens. They tell me they prefer animated movies and stories from modern times than the ones that shaped us." I believe our storytelling traditions, that used to bond families together, are slowly disappearing as the younger generation does not find them relevant anymore."

This narrative overtaking reveals how traditional forms of storytelling, which used to be one of the main ways to transfer knowledge, are being superseded by contemporary techniques of entertainment. This generational gap is a huge threat to keeping folklore alive. Some younger people do recognize folklore as an important part of their heritage but find it difficult to connect with them in the contemporary context.

Another respondent added:

"I've heard folk stories told by my grandparents, but they do not apply to the life I am living today. The stories speak of ancient wars, supernatural beings, and customs that are no longer

observed. They seem far removed from the realities of our current world. And my friends and I love stories that are relatable to our current problems — stories of personal struggles, how success was achieved, or what is happening in the world. “Folklore is interesting, but if it isn’t applied to the context of modernity, I don’t think that is meaningful for many young people.”

This response implies the importance of relevance for folklore transmission. Despite remaining a vital part of many cultures around the world, folklore does not come up against relevant lived experiences in day to day 21st century life.

Theme 3: Folklore and the Transmission of Moral and Social Values

Of course, folklore has always played an important role in helping people learn about moral values, ethical behavior, social responsibilities, etc.

A respondent narrated:

“As a schoolteacher, I would tell folk stories to show and teach lessons about honesty, kindness, respect, and such. Much of the listening and recalling in this way stuck with the students since it involved interesting tales. We have many tales in the village, and one that I love the most is of a fraudulent merchant who tried to cheat a buyer and was finally caught and punished. Stories like this made ethical lessons more familiar. But it seems that with the end of folklore moral education is losing its experiential nature and becoming more and more theoretical. Young people learn about values in books, but they don’t connect with them the same way we did through storytelling.”

This narration reveals how folklore was once an important part of value-based education. With less story-telling in schools we can expect less shoring-up of morals in our society. The fraternal discord is also mitigated by folklore as it creates social cohesion and strengthens solidarity through shared values and cultural norms.

Another respondent added:

“We have folk proverbs from way back which teach us how to treat others. A phrase I have grown up hearing in our community is, ‘A neighbor’s peace is your peace.’ We will all live in harmony if we take care of one another. These proverbs and folk tales taught us how to settle disputes, respect our elders, and help one another. Yes, I was trained on data until Oct 2023 So now, looking at the community, I see a lot of people stop saying those expressions and that’s what, the feeling of unity in our community starts to lack. If we don’t have folklore, we lose the values that once connived us,”

This reflects the idea that folklore plays an important role in creating social cohesion and affective ties within a community. If folklore is not maintained actively, there may be loss of cultural values too.

Theme 4: Difficulties in Transmitting Folklore

Due to globalization & advance technology the arresting of folklore in everyday life has been dissolved.

A respondent narrated:

“We would sit together for the evening and would engage in folk storytelling, poetry, traditional performances. But today, particularly foreign entertainment is ubiquitous. Our youth is more inclined towards Western movies, songs, and other digital content. The traditional telling of stories no longer holds sway. I'm afraid if we don't take measures to maintain our folkloric identities, our children would grow up not knowing who we are as a cultural group.”

Comments: This account exemplifies external factors in folklore transmission. The contrast between universal entertainment takes over to the detriment of traditional folklore engagement. The decreasing role of elders in storytelling is another reason folklore is declining.

Another respondent added:

“Our elders were once the first custodians of our folklore. They handed down stories, proverbs, and songs to younger generations. However, many families today are not sitting together and sharing these stories. People are busier, and the elders do not feel that their wisdom is valued anymore. This is partly why folk is no longer being passed on like it used to.”

In this answer, the author states that the declining role of elders in storytelling about culture is yet another important challenge. Communication between generations is crucial for folklore preservation.

Discussion

Folklore in District Muzaffarabad, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has always been an important mode to cross the cultural heritage, moral values and collective identity from generation to generation. However, evidence suggests that the traditional means of folklore transmission are weakening in the face of modernization, urbanization, and the pervasive influence of digital media. Other respondents pointed out that in former times, storytelling, folk songs, and proverbs were part of the everyday lives of people, providing moral guidance, re-enforcing social norms, and cultivating community cohesion. This is why elders played a critical role in this transmission: to make sure that younger generations received an inheritance of historical memory and ethical practices. But as family patterns change and nuclear family units become more prevalent, the age-old direct intergenerational relationship has faded and, in the process, the folklore medium lost its status as an important vehicle of cultural identity. This concurs with knowledge that oral traditions cannot survive in rapidly evolving societies without conscious preservation efforts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The study also shows that younger generations in AJK view folklore more as something out of date and irrelevant to their modern life experiences. Others commented that although older generations continue to relate stories, younger audiences tend to sigh or miss the deeper significance of them. The best way to preserve folklore is to change it to match with current time and to be more acceptable to the people of the current period (Setiawan, 2024). The new age of global entertainment slows down the pace of storytelling, as social media and TV shows and movies often overshadow conversational narratives. Yet, some participants argued that rather than viewing digital venues as a threat, these can be used to recapture folklore by sharing folk stories via podcasts, YouTube channels and digital storytelling apps (Miao & Zhang, 2024).

Another of the group's main concerns was the waning importance of community gatherings in folklore transmission. In the past, folk tales, songs, and proverbs were handed down in communal contexts like village assemblies, evening storytelling sessions, and neighborhood celebrations.

Migrant respondents noted that these collective exchanges helped keep folklore alive, while laying down a common cultural identity. But as people leave villages for urban centers, and cultural gatherings become less common, there are fewer opportunities for knowledge transfer by word of mouth. This observation supports research showing that cultural erosion happens in the void left by the removal of the settings in which transmission occurs (Bihari, 2023). These are not just tales that will be lost with the loss of folklore; the wisdom and values that we derive from such narratives can also be lost.

Nevertheless, some respondents were hopeful for folklore's preservation. They suggested rekindling interest through storytelling workshops, cultural events and in-school folklore education programs. Adding traditional folklore to the formal curriculum might strengthen connections between generations and help it survive in an organized way (Dalyan et al., 2024). Likewise, documentation efforts (e.g., oral histories, folklore compilation, etc.) were addressed as concrete steps towards the preservation of AJK's intangible culture heritage. This study emphasizes the need to balance tradition with modernity in order for folklore to continue being a pertinent and impactful means of cultural transmission in AJK.

Conclusion

Folklore has formed one of the main components of Muzaffarabad cultural identity as a means of passing down moral and ethical lessons, traditions, historical knowledge and social values. But the findings show that modernization, urbanization and the spread of digital media have drastically undermined its traditional means of transmission. The younger generations grow further away from oral storytelling with the advances of family structure and digital entertainment with less interaction as generations combine and collide. Yes, the demise of community storytelling gatherings accelerates this cultural erosion. Despite such challenges, folklore is still an integral part of AJK's heritage. Its persistence relies on adaptive measures in which folk narrative is incorporated into education, and digital spaces and storytelling events are employed. Preserving folklore through documenting and archiving it can also prevent its rich narratives from being lost with time. Through a combination of Traditional and Modern method, folklore can be ensured to assimilate Social Values, Cultural Identity and Intergenerational Relations in AJK.

Recommendations

1. In this context, folklore as cultural heritage can be added in the curriculum of schools thus educating the students with cultural heritage, ethics and history.
2. Government and cultural institutions must adapt folk tales, songs and proverbs to new formats, using e-books, podcasts and social media to interest young people.
3. Organizing storytelling events or folklore festivals within communities can enliven oral stream of storytelling and enable inter-speaker communication leading to transmission of geographical information within local households.
4. Storytelling done in the home by parents and elders is the best way to bridge generations and keep folklore traditions alive in everyday family life.
5. Folklore needs to be captured not only in words, but in visual and oral recordings, to make safe witness for posterity.

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